United Nations S/2003/542

Security Council

Distr.: General
13 May 2003

Original: English

Letter dated 8 May 2003 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

The United Nations Tajikistan Office of Peace-building (UNTOP) was established on 1 June 2000 with the Council's support following the withdrawal of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan. In view of the important and positive role being played by UNTOP, I decided last May to extend the mandate of the Office for an additional period of one year, until 1 June 2003, and informed members of the Security Council accordingly. In September 2002, I appointed Vladimir Sotirov (Bulgaria) to serve as my Representative in the country and as head of UNTOP, replacing Ambassador Ivo Petrov (Bulgaria).

As provided for by the Office's terms of reference, UNTOP continued to focus its activities during the past year on the consolidation of peace and national reconciliation, promotion of the rule of law, strengthening of democratic institutions and support for national capacity-building in the area of human rights. A priority of UNTOP during the past year was the promotion of an open political environment in the country, which could contribute to further consolidation of the peace process.

UNTOP has actively promoted a process of national reconciliation and consolidation of peace and stability in Tajikistan. In pursuit of those objectives, during the past year UNTOP continued a series of Political Discussion Club meetings, held in all provinces of the country. Each of the meetings was attended by representatives of the central Government, heads of local administrations, leaders of political parties and representatives of law enforcement bodies, the business community, civil society and mass media. The meetings of the Club focused on issues of national reconciliation, good governance, economic reform, improvement of the electoral system, democratization of the society and promotion of human rights. Several of the resulting recommendations have been implemented. During the past two years, the club meetings have become events of national political importance and a catalyst for national reconciliation.

The Office has continued to maintain close contacts with the parties to the 1997 General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan. UNTOP's facilitation has helped to avoid developments that could endanger the still fragile political stability in the country.

During the past year the Office played an important role in strengthening the rule of law in Tajikistan. With the financial assistance of the Government of Germany, UNTOP helped to establish a forensic laboratory for the Ministry of Interior and organized the training of its personnel.

03-35799 (E) 130503

The Office continued its support for the social integration of ex-combatants and demobilized contractual soldiers through assistance provided for their vocational training. During the past year 270 ex-combatants received training in the centre, 215 of whom have been successfully employed.

As part of national capacity-building in the judicial sector, the Office, with the valuable assistance of Slovakia, organized a familiarization and study visit to Slovakia for a group of senior officials from the Supreme and Constitutional Courts and the Ministries of Justice, Interior and Security. Subsequently, the members of the delegation introduced important innovations to the functioning of their respective institutions.

During the past year the Office has accelerated its multifaceted activities in the promotion of human rights. UNTOP facilitated the establishment of a national governmental commission on human rights treaty reporting, which has successfully commenced its work. As part of human rights education activities UNTOP has established, in cooperation with the Government of Tajikistan, the Human Rights Information and Documentation Centre and is publishing a monthly human rights newspaper (which comes out as an attachment to the national Teachers' Gazette). The Office has organized several training courses and seminars in human rights for university professors, prosecutors, criminal investigators, attorneys and high school teachers. UNTOP is planning to further expand its projects on human rights education and promotion, building on support from the Government, civil society and international donors.

The process of post-conflict peace-building and consolidation of stability in Tajikistan has come a long way. At the same time, a multiplicity of problems related to the civil war, including the high unemployment rate among ex-combatants, the spread of small arms among civilians, drug trafficking and the resurgence of extremist organizations, such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir, make the political equilibrium of the country fragile. Under these circumstances, the holding of free, fair and non-violent general elections in 2005 would be an important objective and an indicator of UNTOP's achievement of its goals.

In view of the important and very positive role being played by UNTOP, as well as the country's continuing need for support in its post-conflict peace-building efforts, and with the concurrence of the Government of Tajikistan, it is my intention to continue the activities of UNTOP for a further period of one year, until 1 June 2004.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Kofi A. **Annan**